



# Guidelines for Implementation of the Eastern Region's Urban Connections Program

*Collaborative Opportunities Help All Stakeholders Seek Common  
Solutions*

2011 - 2016

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## INTRODUCTION

Urban Connections (UC) is an urban outreach approach of the Eastern Region, U.S.D.A. Forest Service (FS), based on the energy, commitment, networks, and proven programs of urban community activists. It aims to draw together all three branches of the FS (State & Private Forestry; Research; and National Forest System) to work with urban leaders and other agencies to gain a foothold in major metro areas, in order to connect citizens to the land.

With nine of the U.S.'s 20 largest metro areas, the Eastern Region is uniquely positioned to connect with diverse and underserved constituents. The FS has a long history of working with the public. The involvement of citizens in close proximity to the national forests has been a great value to the Agency. UC seeks to expand this involvement to constituents in major metro areas. UC is based on a simple idea: to reach out to urban communities and build alliances that compliment the Forest Service mission statement of "Caring for the Land and Serving People."

UC research revealed 69% of individuals living in and around urban areas indicated that they have visited a national forest in the past five years, yet only 21% knew the federal agency that manages those forests and only 8% felt very informed of activities taking place in national forests. While urban stakeholders use our national forests for recreation, relaxation, and commodities, historically they have had little opportunity for information exchange on the management of national forests. Limited stakeholder awareness of Forest Service responsibilities for our national forests can be detrimental to the reputation of the Agency.

Building on the research findings and recommendations, the FS continues to pursue opportunities to build and strengthen its reputation with urban stakeholders, and build bridges between urban stakeholders and local stakeholders. This is accomplished through information exchange where the opinions of urban constituents can be heard and forest management practices (such as fire management) can be explained and discussed. An outcome of this is that the FS can better align its programs and communications to meet stakeholders' needs.

Currently UC is working with urban communities located in Boston, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Chicago, New York, and Detroit. The major initiative is developing awareness of the Forest Service to urban constituents through partnerships, networks, and established relationships. UC strives to be a touchstone for public involvement, information sharing, and partnerships. This will involve the engagement of interagency partner's interested citizens, non-profit organizations, and non-government organizations. UC aims to build on existing urban outreach efforts of Eastern national forests, and connect to other urban education, research, and development work taking place nationwide.

# **FOUNDATION**

## **Vision**

An Eastern Region effort to grow and foster long-term relationships with urban constituents in the Northeast and Midwest, resulting in increased stewardship of natural resources, from backyards to America's forests; thereby making management decisions pertaining to our public lands that are more representative of diverse interests.

## **Mission Statement**

"To actively engage urban residents in forest management through outreach activities in key Eastern Region cities, in order to create partners who understand and communicate the role of natural resources in their lives, contribute their unique perspectives to resource planning, and speak & act knowledgeably on behalf of the Forest Service."

## **Goals**

- Improve stewardship of the nation's forests by promoting collaborative and sustainable forest management, involving constituents in natural resources management decisions and enhancing the capacity of forests to provide public benefits (i.e. water and recreation);
- Work to build solid relationships with communities to improve communication of FS issues and opportunities to get involved to urban residents;
- Partner with communities to support livability and stewardship, and enhance the quality of life for urban residents;
- Motivate local urban opinion leaders, the urban news media, and other urban information outlets to highlight, share, and distribute FS information and messages about natural resources.
- Identify ways to better understand and reach urban audiences over the long term, in order to increase the participation of urban residents (including underserved communities) in Forest Service programs, activities, issues, as well as in the Forest Service's workforce.

## **Objectives**

### Stewardship of the Nation's Forests

- Promote sustainable forest management and enhance the capacity of forests to provide public benefits.

### Partnerships with Communities

- Create ongoing stakeholder involvement opportunities.

### Constituent Information and Involvement

- Enable urban residents to understand the importance and the complexities of managing the nation's forests, and to take commensurate action.

### Forest Service's Organizational Effectiveness

- Increase understanding of urban needs and increase agency diversity.

## **Outcomes**

As a result of implementing the vision, the Key regional cities will realize several changes:

### 1 Stewardship of Forests

- More engagement by communities in improving the management of their forests
- Increased knowledge among urban residents about the responsible use of natural resources

### 2. Partnerships with Communities

- A significant number of ongoing, interactive relationships with stakeholders in each of the key cities
- Increased ability to leverage funds in communities

### 3. Constituent Information and Involvement

- Increased knowledge of the Forest Service and engagement from Congressional leaders who represent urban constituents
- Increased effort by urban news media to seek information and comments from the Forest Service on natural resource-related issues

4. Forest Service's Organizational Effectiveness
  - Higher number of urban residents who see the Forest Service as a viable career opportunity for urban youth
  - More extensive incorporation of urban stakeholder interests in Forest Service programs and planning
  - Enhanced capacity of the agency to work with partners, including its state partners, and communities
  - Sharing of emerging information among the agency and its partners

## **Strategic Approach**

1. Synergy and Independence Recognized: Urban outreach is designed as a shared effort that recognizes the independence of the Forest Service branches. Key areas for joint work are those where expertise can be bundled to more efficiently and comprehensively deliver services to urban stakeholders. However each branch may carry out specific program responsibilities independently.
2. Networking Emphasis, Building on Existing Programs: Urban outreach achieves results primarily by working in a networking capacity and building on existing programs.
3. Community Activists are the Main Audience: Community activists and opinion leaders are the main audience for urban outreach, since working with them multiplies results. The outreach will focus on addressing their needs, and in the process building a receptive climate for involving them in the missions of the Forest Service and state partners.
4. Key City Focus: Key cities are identified based on potential for success as defined by the presence of strong local partners, influential media markets, common rallying points or issues, and impacts on natural resources caused by urban migration. The number of key cities will depend on the amount of resources that are available for long term urban outreach.
5. Adaptable to Local Situations: Even though there is an umbrella that sets the general approach of joint outreach efforts, specific outreach activities will be tailored to best fit each individual key city. Joint outreach begins with a consideration of current agency presence and the establishment of a local outreach team.
6. Common Messages Used: When appropriate, outreach efforts will involve common messages across the branches of the Forest Service and the key cities to support the concept of one Forest Service, to enhance the saturation of messages, and to allow for efficiencies in producing outreach materials.

7. Reinforcing Communications: Primary efforts at building engaged relationships with activists will be reinforced by communicating more broadly in cities, through media outreach, by placing information in public areas, and through other one-way communication vehicles.

## **SCOPE OF THE PROGRAM**

The study and information gathered by a Forest Service contractor showed:

- People placed high value on national forests,
- People have little knowledge of the Forest Service itself; and
- A large number of stakeholders were interested in knowing more about the Forest Service.

Based on these findings, Urban Connections was launched.

The goals are to:

- Identify the interested stakeholders most influential, ‘opinion leader’ groups and individuals;
- Explore outreach into select cities; and
- Build relationships with interested urban stakeholders ultimately resulting in increased urban resident participation in Forest Service programs, activities, issues, and in the agency workforce.

In these dynamic times, there is an even greater need to connect with urban stakeholders regarding the important environmental issues supported by the FS. Over the coming decade, diverse stakeholder groups will have to work closely together if we are to aggregate these issues. We must rely on all levels of government, academia, utilities, private sector, and non-profit organizations to contribute toward this common goal. Strategic planning is a critical element in articulating a shared vision, and for building the necessary partnerships for disparate organizations to work together on common goals. The key is to identify needs that are shared by many stakeholder groups. Effective strategic planning is essential for moving collaborative programs forward, and gaining the required support for National directives.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Steering Team**

- A steering team will oversee joint urban outreach efforts. The team will be made up of the following positions:
  - Eastern Region: - Director of Public and Government Relations  
- Forest Supervisors
  - Northeastern Area: - Field representative of Forest Management  
- Manager Urban and Community Forestry Program
  - Research Units: - Assistant Director / Project Leader
- The role of the Steering Team will be to set overall program guidance, monitor progress, and facilitate decisions about where to focus efforts, the level of resources to commit, and ways to achieve outcomes.
- The Urban Outreach Program Manager will manage the team process for the Steering Team and participate in all meetings and deliberations.

### **Eastern Region Urban Connection Program Manager**

- Joint urban outreach efforts will be supported by several activities at the regional level. These include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Helping to identify urban activists in a given city.
  - Facilitating overall messages and information packages as called for by the steering team.
  - Acquiring needed budgets.
  - Facilitating networking between cities and into opportunity cities.
  - Upward reporting.
  - Monitoring.
  - Overseeing contractor services.
  - Assisting with the development of local programs of work.
  - Publicizing efforts.
  - Coordinating with Recruiting and other national efforts.
  - Supporting larger projects such as the Greenfield Village Expansion

### **City Core Teams**

- At a minimum, City Core Teams will be made up of representatives from each Forest Service unit that is affected by the city. Additional Forest Service units or state and local representatives can be added if desired by the team.



- City Core Teams will be responsible for developing yearly programs of work and carrying out on-the-ground activities.

#### City Program Managers

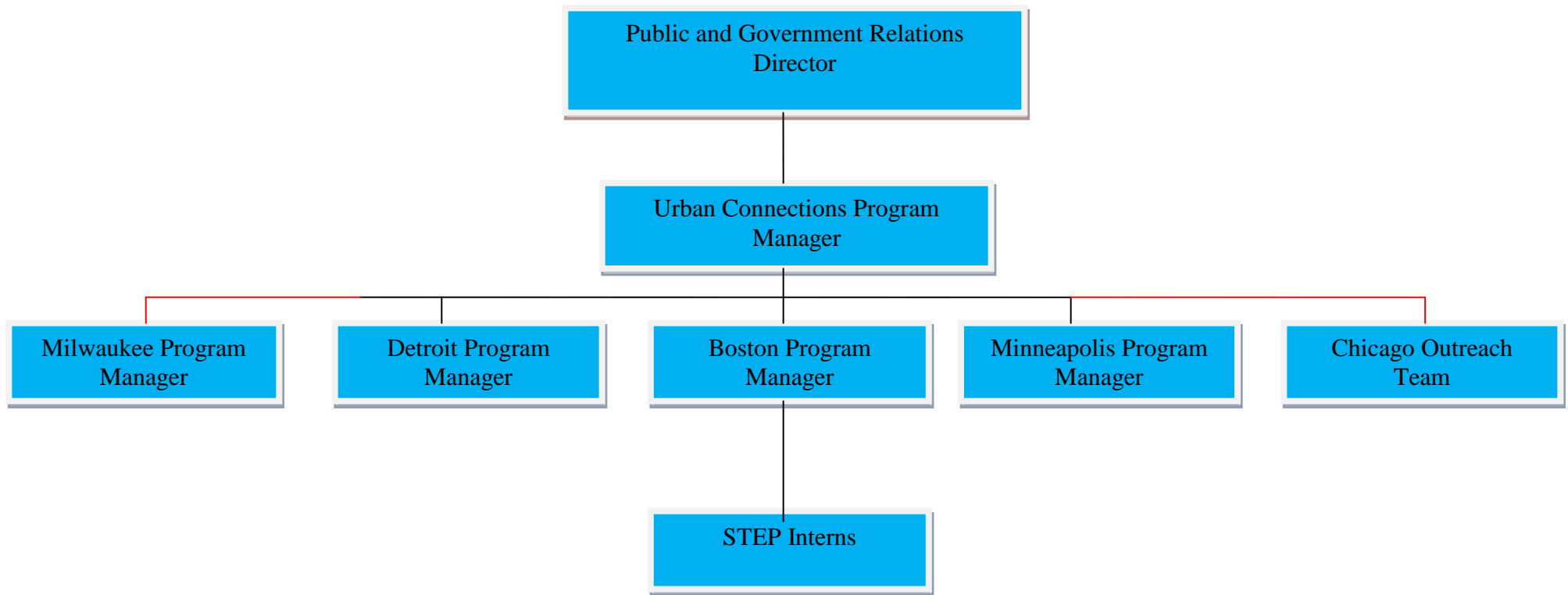
- City Program Managers are required in cities.
- The basic role of the City Program Manager is to serve as the day-to-day face of the Forest Service in the city, working to continually learn more about the city's constituents and better connect them to the Forest Service. The City Program Manager is responsible for all logistics for ongoing communications and special events, all team management for the City Core team, and continued communications with affected Forest Service units.
- Additional responsibilities for City Program Manager can be negotiated by the City Core Team in conjunction with the line officers and the headquarters offices.

## **APPENDIX**

- Organization Chart
- Urban Connections city short term action plan
- Target Audiences
- Legal Connections
- Relationship to National Strategic Plan, Forest Service Chief Initiatives and Region 9 Courageous Conservation Goals
- City Charter - Sample
- Swot Analysis



# ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE USDA FOREST SERVICE EASTERN REGION URBAN CONNECTIONS PROGRAM



**Eastern Region US Forest Service  
Urban Connections Outreach in a Typical City**

City:	Completed by: UC city program managers
Date:	Approved by:
Core team approved : Y - N	Steering team approved: Y - N

There are activities that are common to most urban outreach efforts. Although each situation has unique aspects, the following workload should be anticipated

IMPLEMENTATION			EVALUATION	
What needs to be done?	By whom and when?	What resources?	What evidence indicates progress?	How and when will evidence be gathered?
Learn About Concerns & Issues of city	UC City program manager	Do preliminary work to learn the concerns and issues held by Forest Service network	Identify inventory of where the Forest Service fits in. Review materials, products inventory	Articulate language of UC research and Urban Connections strategic plan
Identify & Contact Stakeholders	UC City program manager	Urban stakeholders who might be interested in working with the Forest Service, some are already known to the agency, some are identified by other partners. Primary focus is <b>urban non-local constituents not</b> adjacent to National Forests. Continuing attention to local (forest adjacent) and visitor constituents.	A mailing list of these potential interests should be compiled such as community activists & leaders, groups working with underserved communities,	Letters sent to them to invite them to a public dialogue session to discuss their interest in natural resources, national forests, and Forest Service involvement in their community.
Core team coordination and leadership	UC City program manager	The three branches of the Forest Service. Review strategies of other FS branches; build on existing programs & resources. Steering and core teams	Expand joint positions in city to achieve more presence. Collaborative management in program delivery and with the other agencies to determine their interest.	Share info packaging and delivery After a list of all the interested parties is compiled, host a joint meeting in the outreach city
Host Public Dialogue Sessions	UC City program manager	Serves as the focal point for organizing public dialog sessions with support of.	Stakeholders have the opportunity to suggest potential opportunities for involvement.	This information sets the stage for developing an action plan

Develop a City Plan	UC City program manager ( 1-2 team meetings, follow up)	The plan should be developed by all the partners	A short-term action plan and create longer-term once more is known about the target city, groups and their interests.	Develop focus areas for city. The timeline should be factored in with an overarching Urban Connections timeline to implement.
Implement the action plan	UC City program manager	Involves following up with external contacts,	Arranging for and holding meetings or participating in someone else's meeting, evaluating meeting outcomes and commitments planning next steps.	Following-up with key groups and identify new contacts. City informed about the Forest Service. information exchange, involved in natural resources and Forest Service people learn from urban stakeholders
Communicate , brand and Market	UC City program manager	Forest pao's	Communicating ideas, keeping key interests up-to-date:	Writing articles and success stories for newsletters, Making referrals throughout the Urban Connections network, Seeking support in various forms, Participating in conferences, both internal and external
Monitor and Adjust Ongoing Efforts	UC City program manager (on going)	Memberships in public groups change over time—meaning new relationships need to be established and nurtured.	External and internal are initiated and efforts have been started in a city, commitments and outcomes are being met	Inventory of who is doing what in city and within our interagency group Additional dialogue, convening the partners and leadership to provide updates and seek feedback. Intern presence in each city to sustain efforts

Urban outreach requires travel to meet with partners, forests and interested community activists and groups. Varied needs of cities drive differing approaches taken in the cities, but in every case the manager serves as a leader, problem solver, information networker, implementer, convener, capacity builder, relationship cultivator, fund seeker and more. In addition, the manager hires and supervises student interns, plus the workload has a considerable administrative component.

**Key structure** -Steering Team to outline Core Team roles and activities. Charter made regarding budgeting forest staff time to contribute to program's results so that program commitments can be made based on some certainty that there is staff to carry them out.

**Budget**-The current R9 budget for the program includes salary funding for one program manager, special project money to pay for contracting services, communication tools and student interns, and funds to pay travel expenses for the manager.

## **Target Audiences**

**External** – Urban community activists; underserved communities; students and youth educators; forest users; non-profit organizations; local municipal entities; environmental groups; potential employees; public schools, universities and technical colleges, and other partners.

**Internal** – Regional Foresters; Forest Supervisors; Forest Public Affairs Officers, outreach coordinators; Washington Office Leadership Team, and other opinion leaders.

**Governmental** – Federal, state and local agencies (especially planning, education, natural resource and urban divisions.

**Media** – All major and non traditional media outlets that cover forest management issues.

**Elected Officials** – State elected officials; city and county administrators. Whose districts include NFS lands and/or large urban areas;

## Appendix: Legal connections

Why is this important... and why are WE the people who should be doing it? Further connections between Urban Connections and laws, regulations, policies and activities follow. (Selected authorities.)

The Department of Agriculture Organic Act of 1862 (7 U.S.C. 2201): “diffuse among the people of the United States useful information on subjects connected with agriculture in the most general and comprehensive sense of the word.”

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 (note)): “to the fullest extent possible... all agencies of the Federal Government shall make available to States, counties, municipalities, institutions, and individuals, advice and information useful in restoring, maintaining, and enhancing the quality of the environment.” 4321 (Section 2, purpose): “To declare a national policy which will encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment ... to enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation.”

The National Environmental Education Act of 1970 (public law 91-516): This Act identified education as a mechanism for improving the quality of the human environment.

The National Forest Management Act of 1976 (section 219.6, public participation): “(a) The intent of public participation is to – (1) Broaden the information base upon which land and resource management planning decisions are made; (2) ensure that the Forest Service understands the needs, concerns, and values of the public; (3) Inform the public of Forest Service land and resource planning activities; and (4) Provide the public with an understanding of Forest Service programs and proposed actions.... (c) Public participation activities, as deemed appropriate by the responsible line officer, shall be used early and often throughout the development of plans. ... (d) Public participation activities should be appropriate to the area and people involved. Means of notification should be appropriate to the level of planning. Public participation activities may include, but are not limited to, requests for written comments, meetings, conferences, seminars, workshops, tours, and similar events designed to foster public review and comment.”

The National Environmental Education Act of 1990 (20 U.S.C. 5501 (note)): “Federal natural resource agencies such as the United States Forest Service have a wide range of environmental expertise and a long history of cooperation with educational institutions and technology transfer that can assist in furthering the purposes of the Act.”

Forest Service NEPA Manual: “2. It is Forest Service policy to: (a) Give early notice of upcoming proposals to interested and affected persons (FSH 1909.15, sec. 07)” (Note that 14% of respondents in the original urban connections study said they would like to be more involved in Forest Service projects. This result can be applied across the East.)

Forest Service Manual 1602: “Objectives: The broad objectives of conducting information programs and activities are to: 1. Increase public awareness of and understanding of Forest Service programs, activities, benefits, and services, and stewardship of natural resources.

2. Facilitate the participation of individuals, organizations, groups, other Federal agencies, and State, local, and tribal governments in Forest Service decision-making processes, programs, and activities.



Forest Service Manual 1603: “Policy: 1. Inform the public of how they may make use of and benefit from National Forest System lands, resources, programs, facilities, and services...

4. Provide educational opportunities for the public to develop knowledge, interest, and understanding of natural resources and the environment. 5. Distribute background information on potential Forest Service decisions and provide individuals, organizations, groups, businesses, other Federal agencies, and State, local, and tribal governments opportunities to become involved in the various stages of the decision making process. 6. Inform individuals, organizations, groups, businesses, other Federal agencies, State, local, and tribal governments on the status of ongoing programs, projects, and activities. 7. Offer orientation to, and interpretation of, the cultural, historical, and natural resources found within the National Forest System. 8. Provide Forest Service employees with a continuing assessment of public concerns, interests, and attitudes that relate to the development and operation of Forest Service programs, activities, and services...11. Evaluate and understand public opinion toward the Forest Service as it relates to meeting the public’s needs and expectations as a natural resource management agency. 12. Make recommendations to agency officials concerning policies and actions that affect or are likely to affect public opinion about the Forest Service.

Forest Service Manual 1720: Policy: 1720.3 – Policy: “Forest Service officers shall develop strategic communication plans for public notification and outreach (formerly, public notification plans) in accordance with FSM 1620 and FSH 1709.11, chapter 20, aimed at maximizing participation by all persons in Forest Service programs and activities. The public notification measures in these plans shall: 1. Increase public notification, public relations, and outreach efforts to nontraditional and underserved publics, such as women, minorities, and persons with disabilities. 2. Enhance career opportunity awareness to persons both inside and outside the Forest Service. 3. Develop formal and informal information exchange networks with grassroots and community-based organizations. 4. Ensure that all affected publics are notified of projected and/or impending program changes or new initiatives. 5. Provide for other public notification activities, as needed, to ensure that all civil rights related programs are conducted in accordance with the direction

in FSM 1700 and FSH.” “Underserved Customers, Populations, or Communities. Individuals, groups, populations, or communities that have not been effectively protected, supported, or promoted in the delivery of programs and services on a fair and equitable basis. Examples of underserved customers, populations, or communities include minority groups (such as American Indians and Alaska Natives), persons below the poverty level, and persons with disabilities.”

**Urban Connections**  
**City Name Steering Team Charter**  
**Date, Year**

**Mission and Vision of City Name Urban Connections:**

Urban Connections is an urban outreach approach of the Eastern Region, U.S. Forest Service, based on the energy, commitment, networks, and proven programs of urban community activists. It aims to draw together all three branches of the FS (State & Private Forestry; Research; and NFS) to work with urban leaders and other agencies for gaining a foothold in the cities, in order to connect citizens to the land.

The Eastern Region contains vital content of the national Forest Service constituency. This area includes nine of the top twenty metropolitan areas of the country, four times more than any other FS region.

By improving our understanding of what urban people think of and want from America's Forests, we can better develop relationships and partnerships that develop awareness and support for federally managed forested environments in the City name area. Our partnership and relationship with active stakeholders involved in forest Service dialogue will further urban residents' understanding and participation in national forest and local efforts to increase stewardship of natural resources, control invasive insects and plants, improve the health of their urban environments through increased tree canopy, advocate for open spaces, and sustainable community forests.

**Role of Steering Committee:**

The steering team sets overall program guidance for the City Urban Connections Program Manager and will encourage and provide Forest Service resources to support City Urban Connections work. In addition, the steering committee will annually ascertain the progress of City Urban Connections through cooperative review.

**Role of City Urban Connections Program Manager:**

Develop and present to the Steering Committee a strategic plan for City UC success. This strategic plan will contain as a minimum:

- short and long term strategies to accomplish the mission
- objectives and goals that relate to the strategies
- measurable actions to implement the objectives to reach goals
- Coordinate core team

The City UC program manager will coordinate and facilitate an annual review of City UC activities as well as write and present an annual report.

**Steering Committee Membership:**

Forest Supervisor of the named National Forest,  
Forest Supervisor of the named National Forest,  
Northeastern Area Field Representative,  
Region 9 Director of Public & Government Relations,  
Urban Connections Program Manager  
Representative of Northern Research Station

**Operating Procedures:**

Shared leadership will be the approach for the City Urban Connections Program. The Urban Connections program manager will set up and coordinate a "kick-off" Steering Team meeting to build the framework for the City UC strategic plan. Once the plan is written and approved, The Urban Connections program manager will call another Steering Committee meeting to outline the FY2011 priorities and program of work that will implement the

strategic goals and objectives through measurable actions. The Urban Connections program manager will be responsible for setting up and coordinating quarterly conference calls with the Steering Team for the purpose of (1) updates on progress (2) resource support needs that are foreseen for future activities (3) identifying opportunities to share program work and relay findings from the City UC employee relationship/partnership building.

**Steering Team**

We, the signatories of this Charter, agree in principle to the following goals and objectives, approach and responsibilities, operations guide and protocols and member roles.

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## Urban Connections SWOT Analysis

To better align forest resource management with *all* people's needs through improved dialogue between the Forest Service and non-local, urban residents.

### Criteria

Advantages of program

Capabilities

Resources, Assets, People

Experience, knowledge, data

Marketing - reach, distribution, awareness

Location and geographical

Cultural, attitudinal, behavioral

Philosophy and values

### Strengths

- ▶ Extensive research
- ▶ Remote site employees
- ▶ Top Leadership Support
- ▶ Potential future support
- ▶ National recognition
- ▶ Activists want to be involved
- ▶ Demographic shifts - lifestyle changes
- ▶ Communicate the unique story as “I”

### Weaknesses

- Fear of change in the rural areas
- Limited resources, multiple other demands
- Distance
- Lack of a road map
- Outside of normal systems
- Busy urbanites
- Long time to show results

### Criteria

Effects on core activities, distraction

Disadvantages of remote location

Gaps in capabilities

FS Reputation, presence and reach

Unknown vulnerabilities

Continuity, sustainability

Reliability of data, plan

### Opportunities

#### Management/Values Gap

- Know urban stakeholders' values
- Urban stakeholders' uses of the forests
- Links between constituents' values and activities

#### Reputation Gap

- Awareness, knowledge of national forests
- Perceptions of the Forest Service and its reputation

#### Audience Gap

- Identify new constituents in major cities
- Identify potentially active stakeholders

#### Communications Gap

- Urban constituencies' preferred communication approaches

#### Geographic Gap

- Universality of research

### Threats

- Legislative effects
- Trends change (economics, demographics)
- Lack of education and a true understanding of the issues
- Technological developments
- External accessibility to agency processes
- No agency-wide national strategy for engaging urban America

### Criteria

Remote site

Strategic plan

New informed stakeholders, vertical, horizontal

Partnership developments

Information and research

Leveraged opportunities

Lifestyle trends

National influences?

Technology influence and innovation

### Criteria

Sustaining internal capabilities

Loss of key staff

Political effects

Environmental effects

Issue trends

New technologies, services, ideas

Social changes

